

Free US ETDs (FUSE)

Promoting Open Access to American graduate research

Aim of the FUSE Blog

Posted on **December 1, 2012**

Free US ETDs (FUSE) is a new scholarly communication blog dedicated to a singular cause: advancing free and open access (OA) to American graduate research. While other OA resources focus on promoting Open Access to the scholarly journal literature (even the graduate-student-focused **Right to Research Coalition** limits its campaigns to OA for faculty research), FUSE focuses on open access and publishing issues that specifically surround graduate research and other student works.

Why is OA for graduate student research such an important cause at this time? The answer is complex but worth detailing. Unlike most other nations, American universities have historically depended on a commercial third party to disseminate graduate research (i. e., doctoral dissertations and, to a far lesser extent, masters' theses). That circumstance may have made sense back in the mid-1950's, when microfilm was the most cost-effective technology to duplicate and distribute lengthy academic volumes of narrow interest, but in the digital age that dependency no longer makes sense. Why should potential beneficiaries of graduate research have to look (and pay for) a substantial portion of American student works behind a commercial paywall? Especially when graduate students, their advisors and their universities receive no revenue from that research. Graduate works are expected to enter the stream of scholarship as a contribution to human knowledge. Dissertations and theses are the hard-won, culminating products of earnest graduate students as they prepare to take their place in the world. These unique works of scholarship not only intend to enhance the professional communities our students aspire to join; they also enrich and inspire other scholars, teachers and students; and they offer new insights and knowledge for the interested citizenry. **Graduate works were never intended to represent monetizable content around which a for-profit enterprise would stake its business model.**

Yet over time, as microfilm yielded its technical hegemony to the digital age, the existence of a for-profit, business monopoly controlling access to graduate research now works at cross-

purposes to the power and promise of OA publishing of ETDs. This unfortunate circumstance means that academic libraries must continue to pay for costly annual subscriptions so that their students, faculty members, research staff and administrators may keep track of what new graduate works* have been completed (*at least to some extent — see upcoming posting on how complete the PQ database really is) . It means that individual users without access to a costly library subscription are obligated to buy full text copies of dissertations and theses at prices upwards of \$40 apiece!

By contrast, other countries outside the U.S. have devised systems for freely discovering, accessing and obtaining graduate works as part of their national information infrastructure. Examples include [Theses Canada](#), the UK's [Electronic Theses Online Service](#), the [DART Europe Theses Portal](#), the [Trove service of the Australian National Library](#), and more. Moreover, many institutions and consortia around the globe contribute their metadata for theses and dissertations to the [Union Catalog of the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations](#), a non-profit federated search system. The system is managed in collaboration with **OCLC**, **VTLS**, and **Scirus** — third-party information providers who donate their search platforms for the greater good of the OA cause. This not-for-profit collaborative demonstrates that Open Access to graduate works can be provided without a commercial middleman. But, because not all US institutions choose to contribute their dissertations and theses to the NDLTD catalog, American graduate research is underrepresented in the NDLTD system.

As a consequence, considerable portions of the American graduate research corpus remain locked up for pay-only access. **This regrettable situation can be changed.** According to OA movement leader Dr. Peter Suber, writing in the [SPARC Open Access Newsletter](#), “dissertations are high in quality and low in accessibility, In fact, I'd say they constitute the most invisible form of useful literature and the most useful form of invisible literature. Because of their high quality, the access problem is *worth solving*.

What will it take to set free our American theses and dissertations? That is what this blog has been created to address. Please check back for future postings that aim to share vision, models, roadmaps, and other insights to help move forward the cause of Open Access for all U.S. theses and dissertations. Set our graduate research *free*!



This entry was posted in [Networked Library of Theses and Dissertations](#), [Open Access](#), [This is nuts!](#) by [gclement](#). Bookmark the [permalink \[http://sites.tdl.org/fuse/?p=10\]](http://sites.tdl.org/fuse/?p=10) .

3 THOUGHTS ON “AIM OF THE FUSE BLOG”

**Philip Bolton, Jr.**

on **December 1, 2012 at 1:31 pm** said:

This is great! Look forward to more.

**Peter Suber**

on **January 5, 2013 at 11:16 am** said:

Good luck in this good cause!

I argued my own version of the case ("Open Access for ETDs") at the 9th International Symposium on Electronic Theses and Dissertations (Quebec City, June 7-10, 2006), and published a version of the talk in the July 2006 issue of my newsletter. Because I published it under CC-BY, please feel free to use whatever you find useful.

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/07-02-06.htm#etds>

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:4727443>

**gcllement**

on **January 9, 2013 at 12:21 pm** said:

Peter, Thank you so much for your words of encouragement and for your generosity in sharing your foundational paper from 2006, "Open access to electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs)," which has been an important resource for many of us. I apologize if anything on this blog is not giving sufficient credit where credit is due! Your 2006 paper is now fully cited in the Con-FUSED? section (our list of additional readings) and is fully attributed in the first posting on the blog.

Thank you again for all you do to lead and to encourage! — gpc, 1-9-2013

